## **Poem: “Saga of a People” by Ruth Tanaka**

*Ruth Tanaka was a high school junior at Poston Incarceration Camp in Arizona and won fourth prize for a national contest sponsored by* Scholastic Magazine *in 1945. This poem was printed in the* Poston Chronicle, the *prison camp newspaper.*

*They have sprung from a race as old as Time,*

*Their backs are bent, their hands are wrinkled and brown,*

*For they have toiled long years under a harsh master—Life;*

*Each passing year has left its mark*

*Upon their seemed and weathered faces*

*That show as other faces do,*

*A heart-deep yearning for a far-off land;*

*A land of frail houses, stunted trees, a sacred volcano*

*Sleeping under a blanket of snow.*

*Traces of half-forgotten customs*

*A love for the life-giving sun, the freshening rain, the deep brown soil,*

*Still lingers in their hearts.*

*Deep scars of pain and grief are etched on their worn faces*

*And yet their wise twinkling eyes*

*Have looked on life and found it good.*

*They have come to a fabulous land,*

*While still dreaming the long thoughts of youth;*

*They have sowed their seeds, weeded furrows,*

*Hoed a sun-parched land, watered it and nursed it,*

*Harvested their plentiful crops, built a home*

*And borne their children.*

*Lest they forget the islands of their fathers,*

*They have brought their little treasures with them -*

*A miniature chest of drawers, lacquered dragon-red;*

*Two dainty fans gay with dancing girls;*

*A bamboo screen with a tiny arched bridge*

*A fragile lilies reflected in still water;*

*Little dolls in bright kimonos of hand-painted silk;*

*Delicate tea cups get on a polished tray.*

*The seeds they sowed took root and sprouted;*

*Grew tall and straight with bursting pods;*

*Giving rich promise of fulfillment.*

*So grew their black-haired children*

*Straight and tall, drawing nourishment from the free soil*

*Of this, their native land.*

*Their lives were like a deep, peaceful river*

*The old familiar customs of their ancestors*

*Mixing with the new bewildering ones of their foster country*

*And slowly giving way before them*

*Eating a breakfast of crisp bacon and scrambled eggs*

*Instead of the hot soup and rice they had eaten*

*In the home of their fathers;*

*Raising a huge paper carp on Boys’ Day;*

*Awkwardly tying a silver star to the tip of the family Christmas tree;*

*Reluctantly going to a movie with the children,*

*Leaving behind a friendly game of Go*

*And a cup of steaming, green tea;*

*Driving to the beach and learning to roast hot dogs*

*Over a driftwood fire,*

*And eating them with seed-covered rice cakes;*

*Passing on to their children the ceremonious courtesies*

*That they had learned so long ago.*

*And so they lived out their lives*

*Guided by their sons and daughters*

*Through this strange new world,*

*Slowly changing their deep-rooted ways.*

*They have come to a new home*

*Living in a single room*

*Behind barbed wire -*

*They know that peace has been shattered throughout the world*

*By heavily laden bombs of terror and destruction;*

*But they who love the deeply tranquil soil*

*Are stunned, bewildered by it all,*

*By the cold wall which their American friends*

*Have built about them.*

*Now they are standing on the beloved soil of their Western mother,*

*Their wizened bodies huddled together*

*Against the bitter cold.*

*Rising they look toward the sea*

*Vainly striving through the mists of the past*

*To live again the dreams of their youth,*

*Thinking of a pleasant land where cherry blossoms*

*Warmed their hearts in spring,*

*Where placid goldfish lazily swam in sunny ponds,*

*Where all the contented and peaceful;*

*They turn towards the red glow of a sinking sun*

*Seeing through the distant hills, seeing over all the land*

*The rolling hills and valleys of their western mother.*

*Then they turn towards each other with eyes full,*

*Unshamedly,*

*Understandingly;*

*For deep in their almond, brown eyes,*

*Deep in the innermost depths of their souls (?)*

*There shall always glow a hope,*

*A hope that peace shall come one day*

*A peace forging with understanding and friendship,*

*The islands of their long-lost youth*

*And the far stretching land of their children’s birth.*